



**WHATCOM MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE
2011-2015 STRATEGIC PLAN**

September 10, 2010



NORTHWEST STRAITS
marine conservation initiative

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Many people are unaware of the declining health of the Puget Sound, and the enormous economic costs of that decline. Monumental efforts are taking place to help people understand that the recovery of water quality, marine habitat, and native species is both possible and necessary. The members of the Whatcom Marine Resource Committee (MRC), who represent scientific, economic, government, conservation, recreation, and general public interests, are committed to a common mission of protecting and restoring the marine resources of Whatcom County. In 2009, the MRC launched an intensive strategic planning process to focus their efforts and accelerate the impact of their work.

One of the key elements of the MRC's strategic plan is to demonstrate the value of marine resources from the point of view of human health and well-being. By protecting our marine waters and habitats, we also protect our local food supply, our seafood industry, and our recreation and tourist economy.

Highlighting these human benefits can help make recovery efforts more relevant to the public at large.

As a volunteer body with one part-time staff person, the MRC must be extremely deliberate in how it focuses its resources. In the coming four years, the MRC will focus on educating and involving targeted audiences, coordinating with partners, and serving as a consistent and invaluable resource for policy makers. The MRC 2011-2015 Strategic Plan outlines three primary goals and five related operational strategies.

RESOURCE GOALS:

1. **Marine Water:** Establish good water stewardship as the standard practice in our community.
2. **Marine Habitat:** Reconnect and enhance habitat along the shore in sufficient quantities to sustain healthy marine life.
3. **Marine Life:** Protect the rich diversity of native marine life and restore the sustainability of our local fisheries.

OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES:

- **Education and Outreach**
- **Science**
- **Policy**
- **Partnerships**
- **Performance**

I. INTRODUCTION

The marine resources of Whatcom County are one of our community's most precious assets, and protecting this asset is a high priority for our citizens and elected representatives. In 1999, the Whatcom Marine Resources Committee (MRC) was established to serve as a community-based advisory committee on marine resources, appointed by the Whatcom County Council. The MRC is one of seven county-based Committees that are part of the Northwest Straits Commission (NWSC), a federally funded organization that coordinates efforts to halt the degradation of marine ecosystems in the Northwest Straits region of Puget Sound. The members of the MRC represent scientific, economic, conservation, government, recreational and general citizen interest.

In 2009, after a decade of successful work in research, habitat restoration, and community education, the MRC launched a formal planning process to refocus and revitalize its efforts more strategically. The planning process included gathering information about the state of the resources, evaluating scenarios, and conducting an analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Twelve agency partners were surveyed and MRC Members participated in two full-day planning retreats. The MRC clarified its purpose and vision, identified goals and objectives, and established outcomes in relation to the NWSC Performance Benchmarks.

TARGETED OUTCOMES OF THE WHATCOM MRC *in support of the NWSC Performance Benchmarks*

Marine Water Quality

Marine water quality is sufficient to sustain native marine species and habitats, and not threaten human health.

Marine Habitat

Habitat along our shoreline is fully functional and supports healthy marine life and compatible human uses.

Marine Life

Our salmon, crab, rockfish, clams and oysters are restored to sustainable, harvestable levels, as a tangible measure of ecosystem health.

Education and Outreach

Citizens of all ages value marine resources, work towards understanding the threats, and are actively engaged in protection and enhancement efforts.

Science

Scientific data about marine resources is widely accessible and used consistently to inform decisions and actions.

II. MRC MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

MRC VISION: A healthy, functioning marine ecosystem that is valued, preserved, and enhanced by Whatcom County residents for the well-being and prosperity of all future generations.

MRC MISSION: The Whatcom Marine Resources Committee is a diverse group of informed stakeholders serving to promote and facilitate actions that will protect and restore the marine ecosystem and its resources.

MRC ROLE: The Whatcom Marine Resources Committee works with community partners to help identify marine protection and restoration priorities and support the implementation of recovery plans. The MRC responds to emerging opportunities and challenges, as well as working proactively to speed recovery efforts. The MRC is a volunteer based effort and serves in two primary capacities:

- As an Advisory Committee to the Whatcom County Council, the Whatcom MRC brings these priorities to the attention of policy makers and provides feedback and recommendations on policies and plans that may impact marine resources.
- As one of seven Marine Resource Committees in the Puget Sound, the Whatcom MRC orchestrates targeted projects that improve the condition of marine resources, raise public awareness, and encourage citizen science. What is learned at a local level is shared among the network of MRCs to enhance efforts throughout the region.

MRC ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

- Respect
- Cooperation
- Commitment

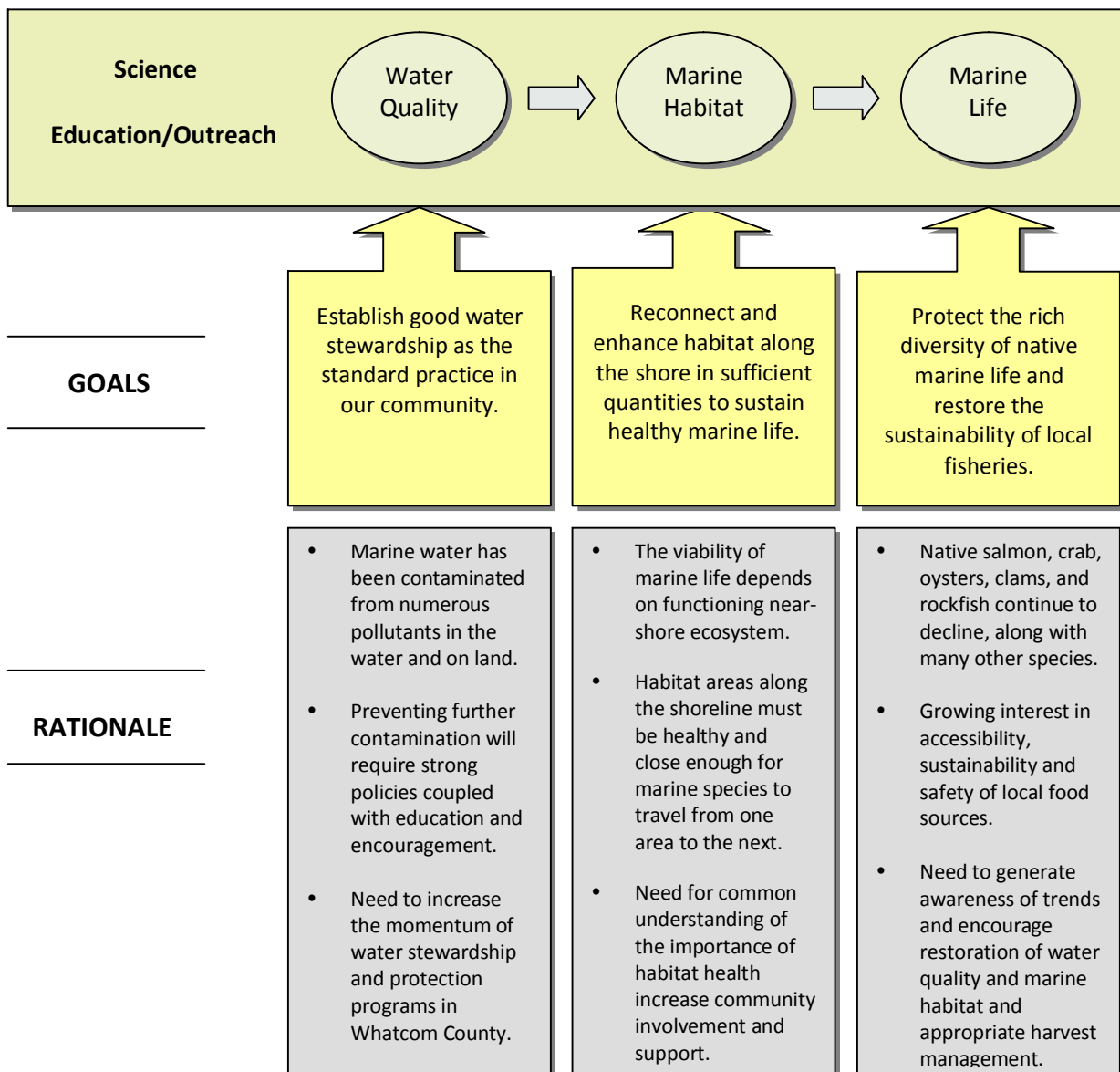
MRC PRINCIPLES AND BELIEFS

- Marine life has inherent value beyond human uses.
- People are integral and powerful actors within the marine ecosystem, not separate from it.
- The health of our society, economy, and environment are inseparable
- Protection of the marine environment is much more cost-effective than restoring or repairing it.
- Coordinated and concerted action on the part of Whatcom County residents, governments, businesses and industries is essential to prevent further degradation and restore our marine resources.
- All of the multiple uses of our marine resources are important, such as water-dependant industrial, commercial, recreational, scientific, and aesthetic ones.
- All native flora and fauna in the marine system are essential to its overall health and function.
- Best available science should guide actions that impact the marine environment and resources.
- Citizens of all ages can participate in gathering data to help build the base of scientific knowledge.
- We all need to better understand our roles and the effects of our behaviors on marine resources, in order to better protect it.

III. CONCEPT AND RATIONALE

In order to achieve targeted outcomes related to each NWSC Benchmark, the MRC developed strategies related to each marine resource area. The goals and rationale explain how the MRC will focus its attention and resources in the coming three years, and why. The MRC’s approach is illustrated below, based on two assumptions:

1. *Marine Life* is dependent upon functioning *Marine Habitat*, which requires good *Water Quality*, which is impacted by activities throughout the watershed and marine environment. These three components of marine health are inherently connected.
2. *Education/Outreach* and *Science* are strategies that inform all of the MRC protection and recovery efforts.



IV. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following Goals and Objectives articulate the targeted results and long-range goal for improving Marine Water Quality, Marine Habitat, and Marine Life. For each area, the MRC identified objectives for the three-year planning period, with a focus on activities that **build community education and involvement, increase coordination with partners, and advance the dialogue with policy makers.**

MARINE WATER QUALITY

Targeted Outcome: Marine water quality is sufficient to sustain native marine species and habitats, and not threaten human health.

GOAL: Establish good water stewardship as the standard practice in our community.

- Objective #1:** Educate targeted audiences about the value of clean water and the steps they can take to avoid water pollution. Utilize existing program materials and adapt as needed. (see Appendix A)
- Objective #2:** Encourage educators and students to become involved in water quality testing and protection projects, and share their findings with elected representatives.
- Objective #3:** Encourage policy makers to publicly recognize businesses, industries, and schools for excellent water stewardship practices.

MARINE HABITAT

Targeted Outcome: Habitat along our shoreline is fully functional and supports healthy marine life and compatible human uses.

GOAL: Reconnect and enhance the habitat along the shore in sufficient quantities to sustain marine life.

- Objective #1** Create a conceptual model of habitat connectivity along the entire shoreline of

Whatcom County. Engage partners, policy-makers, and the public in this process to strategically prioritize restoration efforts and encourage the protection of existing habitat.

Objective #2 Partner with the Port and the City of Bellingham to promote the restoration components of the Waterfront District Master Plan, and continue this type of involvement with other shoreline jurisdictions throughout Whatcom County.

Objective #3: Survey waterfront property owners in Whatcom County to assess level of interest in shoreline monitoring and habitat restoration; follow up with program support (see Appendix A).

Objective #4: Maintain a list of potential restoration and monitoring projects that can be offered to interested community groups, retirees, high school seniors, and teachers. Provide educational materials and technical support as needed.

MARINE LIFE

Targeted Outcome: Our salmon, crab, rockfish, clams, and oysters are restored to sustainable, harvestable levels, as a tangible measure of ecosystem health.

GOAL: Protect the rich diversity of native marine life and restore the sustainability of local fisheries.

Objective #1: Coordinate with partners to mobilize community interest in restoring our local fisheries.

Objective #2: Host a forum for policy makers to share information about the threats to our native fisheries and the related impacts to the local economy and public health. Discuss policy implications for ensuring recovery.

Objective #3: Work with partners to systematically establish additional community-based marine life monitoring programs.

V. OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES

In order to implement the Goals and Objectives, the MRC must simultaneously build capacity and leverage community momentum. Five Operational Strategies have been identified as critical to the MRC's success. In developing the 2011-2015 Strategic Plan, a **targeted outcome** for each operational area and a set of **tactics** were identified to guide the MRC's work.

Operational Strategies:

1. EDUCATION AND OUTREACH
2. SCIENCE
3. PARTNERSHIPS
4. POLICY
5. PERFORMANCE

1. EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Targeted Outcome: Citizens of all ages value marine resources, work towards understanding the threats, and are actively engaged in protection and enhancement efforts.

Tactics:

- Aim education and outreach efforts towards those audiences that can have the biggest impact on crucial protection and restoration efforts.
- Ensure long-term results by encouraging citizen science programs.
- Whenever possible, utilize and adapt educational materials that already exist.
- Encourage citizen involvement in projects, planning, and policy development.

2. SCIENCE

Targeted Outcome: Scientific data about marine resources is widely accessible and used consistently to inform decisions and actions.

Tactics:

- Streamline MRC system for selecting, evaluating, and raising the visibility of citizen science programs.
- Adapt and adopt indicators to monitor the marine health of Whatcom County and the related impacts to the local economy. (see Appendix A)
- Help decision makers use indicators as a planning tool.

3. PARTNERSHIPS

Targeted Outcome: All partners with interests in marine protection and restoration coordinate their efforts.

Tactics:

- Gather input from agency representatives at least bi-annually, to identify opportunities for coordinating action and leveraging funding.
- Creatively partner with industry to find the balance between restoration and commercial uses.

4. POLICY

Targeted Outcome: Policy makers understand marine resource issues and ensure that budgets and regulations result in protection and recovery.

Tactics:

- Provide “green papers” and “white papers” to decision makers in the various municipalities on policy issues affecting marine resources and related economic impacts, both proactively and in response to emerging needs. (see Appendix A)
- Provide Whatcom County Council with regular updates on marine resource protection and restoration successes.

5. PERFORMANCE

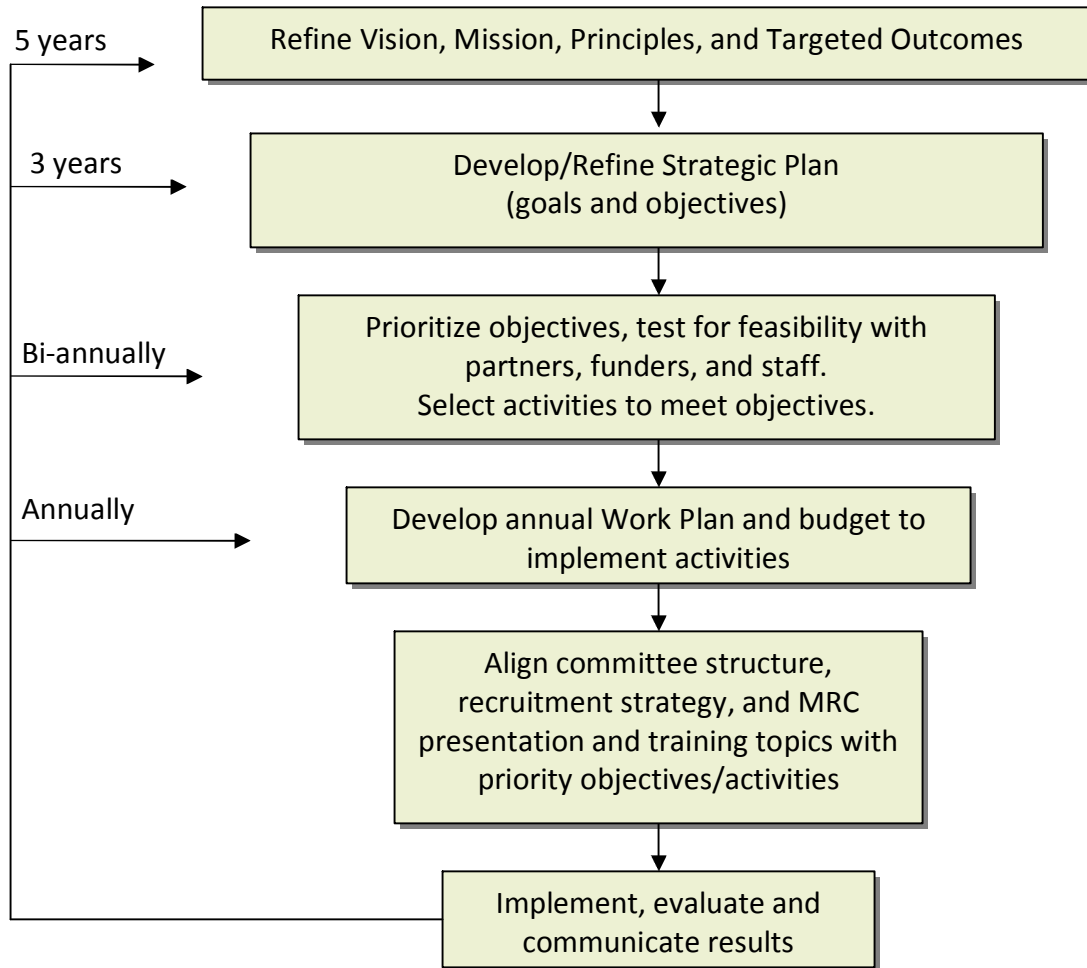
Targeted Outcome: The MRC is widely recognized as a credible and effective leader in marine protection and restoration efforts.

Tactics:

- Organize committees and establish annual calendar of activities to implement the strategic plan.
- Develop systems for member recruitment, orientation, and training.
- Uphold high expectations for member participation.
- Build capacity to effectively evaluate the economic, social, and ecological outcomes of all MRC projects.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

To implement the strategic plan, the MRC follows a cycle of planning, action, and evaluation:



VII. APPENDIX A: REFERENCES

Northwest Straits Commission

The Northwest Straits Commission was established under the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative. The Commission provides guidance and offers resources to seven Marine Resources Committees (MRCs) in the Puget Sound Region. Volunteers from the county-based MRCs select restoration and conservation projects that meet performance benchmarks, attract diverse partners, and engage large numbers of community members in the process. More information: <http://www.nwstraits.org/>

“Citizen Science”

Citizen science is a tactic for engaging the public in making observations and collecting and recording data about the environment. It offers an exceptional opportunity to enhance public stewardship of Puget Sound and provide credible, cost-effective data essential to fulfill research, monitoring and management priorities. More information: http://www.wsg.washington.edu/citizenscience/citsci_toolbox.html

“Dashboard of Indicators”

To make data more accessible to the public and policy makers, indicators are selected to measure and track changes in environmental conditions and community health. Examples include the dashboard of indicators being developed by the **Puget Sound Partnership** (<http://www.psp.wa.gov/documents.php#dash>), and the **Whatcom Counts Dashboard** at <http://www.whatcomcounts.org/whatcom/modules.php?op=modload&name=NS-Indicator&file=index>

“White Papers” and “Green Papers”

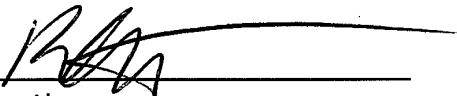
The term “White Paper” refers to a document that is prepared for policy makers to explain research or arguments on a specific issue and lay out a plan of action or recommendation. The term “Green Paper” refers to a document that is used to describe the different sides of the issue, but does not offer a specific recommendation.

Examples of Recognition and Certification Programs:

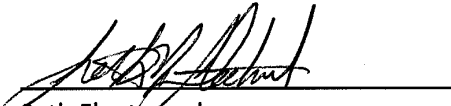
- **Agriculture:** *Salmon Safe:* http://www.stewardshippartners.org/prog_salmon.html
Salmon-Safe farms protect water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and overall watershed health.
- **Whatcom Residents and Businesses:** *Whatcom Watershed Pledge*
Whatcom Watershed Pledges are available for residents and businesses that commit to practices to prevent water pollution. The residential pledge is available through the City of Bellingham and the business pledge is available through Sustainable Connections.
- **Coastal landowners and developers:** *Green Shores* <http://www.greenshores.ca/>
A voluntary certification procedure for coastal landowners and managers. Green Shores provides tools for planning, design and construction professionals who are interested in minimizing the environmental impacts of their projects in a cost effective manner.

VIII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND SIGNATURES

This agreement endorsed on September 9, 2010 in Bellingham, Washington, on behalf of the following members of Whatcom County Marine Resources Committee.

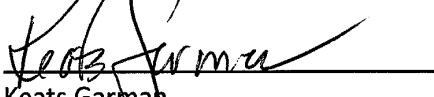


Ron Akeson
Recreational Interest

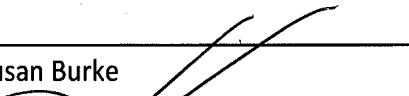


Seth Fleetwood
Bellingham City Council

Jeremy Brown
Economic Interest



Keats Garman
Recreational Interest

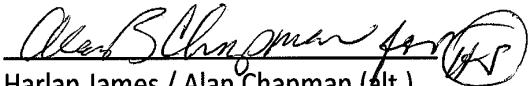


Susan Burke
Economic Interest

Paul Greenough
Blaine City Council



Ken Carrasco
Conservation-Environmental Interest

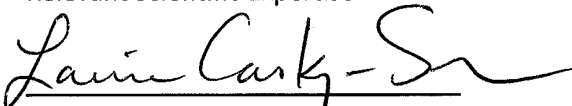


Harlan James / Alan Chapman (alt.)
Lummi Nation



Atina Casas
Relevant Scientific Expertise


Bob Kelly, Jr. / Treva Coe (alt.)
Nooksack Indian Tribe



Laurie Caskey-Schreiber
Citizen-at-Large

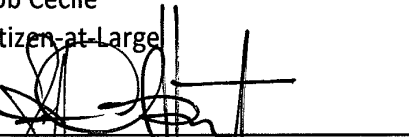


Bill Knutzen
Whatcom County Council

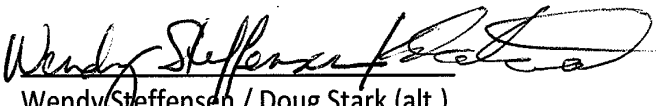


Bob Cecile
Citizen-at-Large

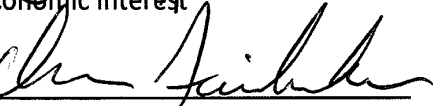
Bert Rubash
Citizen-at-Large



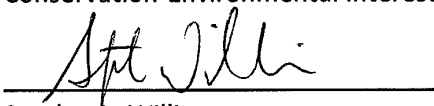
Jeff Chalfant
Economic Interest



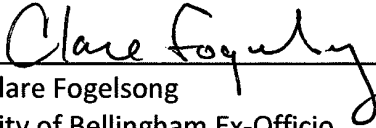
Wendy Steffensen / Doug Stark (alt.)
Conservation-Environmental Interest



Chris Fairbanks
Relevant Scientific Expertise

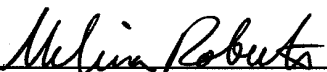


Stephanie Williams
Relevant Scientific Expertise


Clare Fogelson
City of Bellingham Ex-Officio

Mike Hogan
Port of Bellingham Ex-Officio


Scarlet Tang
Whatcom County Ex-Officio


Melissa Roberts
Whatcom County Ex-Officio